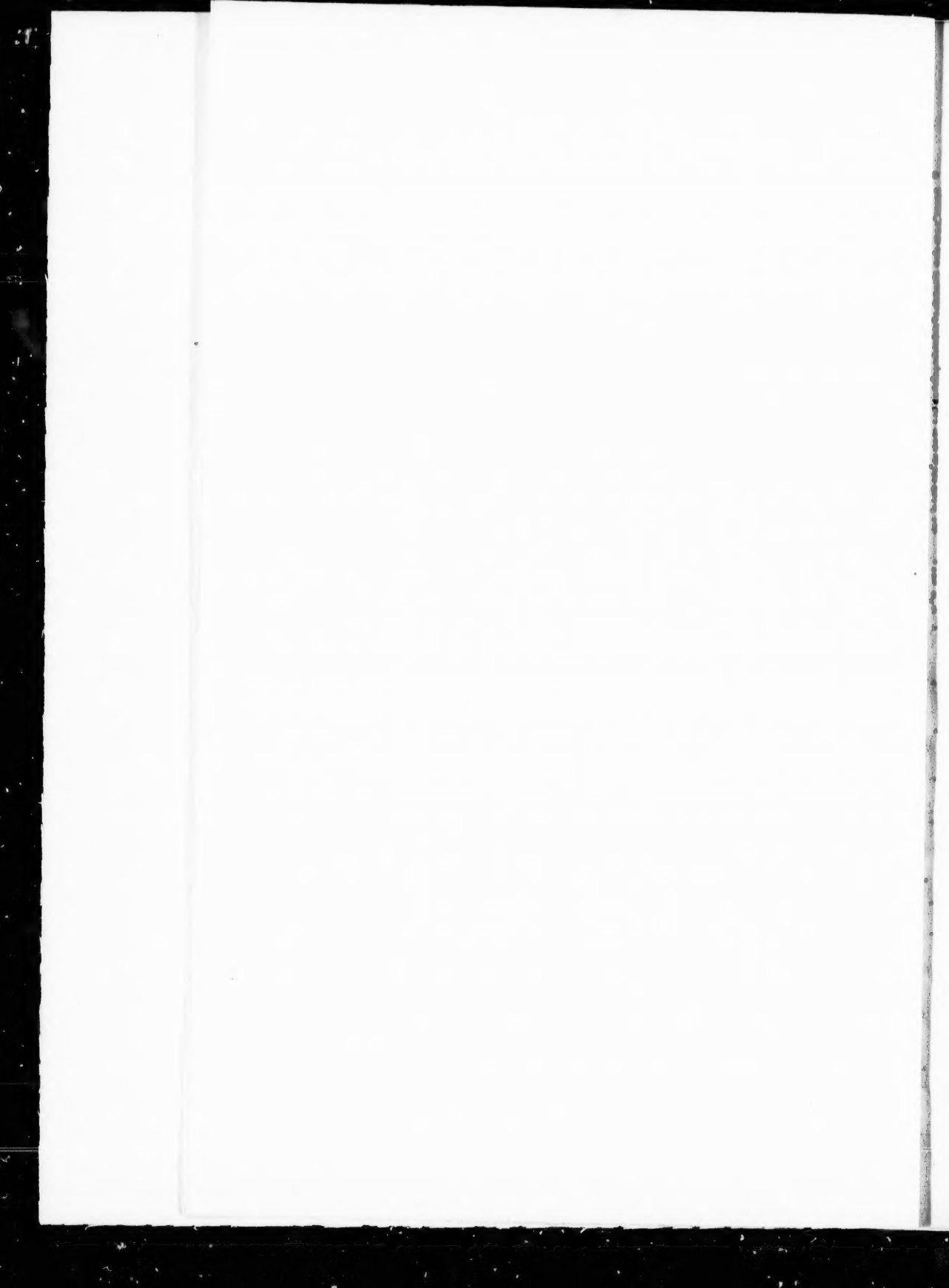




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AN ADDRESS
TO THE INHABITANTS
OF THE
Colborne District,

BY

ELIAS BURNHAM,

County Superintendent of Common Schools for the Colborne District.

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TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE COLBORNE DISTRICT.

I have thought, that it might not be uninteresting or unprofitable for me to address you upon the subject of our Schools. It is a subject, upon which you desire to be informed; and it is my duty to give you the information. I propose, therefore, to lay before you a brief, but plain, statement, respecting the state of education among us; and, at the same time, I shall take the liberty of making a few observations in connection therewith.

When I have done so, I think it will be admitted, that we have not much cause for congratulation. It is humiliating to acknowledge it, but truth obliges me to confess, that, throughout this District, at least, there prevails a great indifference with respect to education. And this indifference, I fear, is not confined to ourselves. I often wonder how, among a people, proverbial for their shrewdness and intelligence, and with the means of increasing and extending knowledge on every side, there should be so little interest evinced in its advancement.

If such is the state of things now, what must it have been before our new School Law came into existence? There can be no doubt, that a great improvement has taken place under this law, and, if with all this improvement, we are still so backward, our former condition must have been bad indeed.

The Colborne District is divided into 88 localities or School Districts. The number of children, residing therein, between the ages of 5 and 16, in the year 1844, was 5337. The number of Schools in operation was 72. The number of children, reported in attendance thereon, 2254. This is exclusive of the Townships of Eldon and Belmont, from which there were no reports for that year. Assuming, however, the probable number, in attendance at Schools in those two Townships, to be 150, we have 2404, as the whole number of children, in attendance at Schools, throughout the Colborne District, for the year 1844. The average time, the Schools have been kept open, is seven months.

From this it appears, that there were 2933 children, during that year, who did not even enter a School!—More than one half of all the children in this District were, during the year 1844, denied the common privilege of learning to read and write; and were forced by their parents to live and grow up in ignorance! Surely the bare mention

of such a disgrace ought to awaken all classes to the necessity of labouring to remedy it.

But the evil does not stop here. Although we have 2464, as the number of children, reported in attendance at School, during the year 1844, still I am safe in saying, that there were not over two thirds of that number constantly there. I believe, I should be safe in limiting them to the one half of that number, and, incredible as it may appear, this would be nearer the truth.

As may be supposed the course of study among them is very limited. In few instances have I seen English Grammar, or History, or Geography taught, and, with one or two exceptions, Mathematics or the Classics never.

Such, in a few words, is the state of education among us. The picture is, certainly, not a flattering one, but its presentation is indispensable, if we desire improvement.

It will, no doubt, be asked to what cause is this state of things to be attributed? The evil is not to be traced to our School system, nor to the want of means of obtaining education, for, perhaps, in no country, do greater facilities exist in this respect, than in Canada. The Legislature has generously provided to each child in the District, yearly, very nearly the sum of five shillings for that purpose.

It is not my province to enter into an explanation of this cause, although I could most willingly do so. Sufficient is it for me to point out the fact, and then leave it to the patriotism and good sense of the people to find a remedy.

To imagine, however, that you do not value education is, in my opinion, to insult you. There is no people so wretched and so depraved, as to assert, that Schools may be dispensed with. Any country, professing to be civilized, cherishes learning. An enlightened people are ever a free people, and, in proportion as they are enlightened and free, so are they prosperous and respected. Social elevation and happiness are inseparable from knowledge, as misery and moral degradation are the companions of ignorance.

By the late School Act education in Upper Canada is become a perfect system. It is liberally provided for and is placed within the reach of every one. Its entire controul is with the people, and upon them, therefore, rests all responsibility. If they neglect its advantages, they alone will suffer, and so, on the other hand, they alone will profit by its support and success.

If I might be allowed to offer a few suggestions respecting the improvement of our Schools, I would, first of all, recommend the providing of good, comfortable School houses. They are really indis-

pensable. More depends upon this, than is generally supposed. Children will not and cannot learn, when they are forced to labour to keep themselves warm; and respectable teachers will never submit to occupy buildings, which cannot shelter them. My earnest advice, therefore, is to provide good School houses.

The next great duty to be observed is the employment of faithful and well qualified teachers. There is a general laxity prevailing, in this respect, which ought no longer to exist. Heretofore, in many instances, the *salary* of the teacher was more thought of, than his *abilities*. The great question was, not how to procure an efficient teacher, but how to obtain a cheap one. As long as this practice prevails, so long will education among us languish. If improvement is desired, you must employ able and respectable teachers. By paying them liberally, you will always obtain them. Money paid thus is well paid, and should be given cheerfully. A parent, who educates his child, gives him that, which is of more value than riches. Gold may purchase distinction for its owner, but knowledge commands it. In all the relations of life, it is easy to see the advantages which the educated man possesses over the ignorant man. Whilst the latter must be content to stand still, the other wins his way to eminence.

The qualifications of a teacher are various, and should be well looked after. They embrace more than a mere acquaintance with books. There is no class of men, on whom devolve greater responsibilities and higher duties, than that of School teachers. With them is left the care and training up of the whole of the rising generation, and, according as they discharge those duties faithfully so will those, who are to succeed us, be fitted to do so with honour and profit.

A mild, paternal disposition, and a knowledge of human nature are indispensable requisites in the character of a good teacher. Patience is, above all things, desirable, and a study of the different dispositions and capabilities of the children, committed to his care, necessary to the proper development of their minds and to their improvement. A kind, agreeable teacher will do more for the advancement of children, than one, who is both feared and hated. A tyrannical teacher is a calamity, and much censure is due to those who employ him.

The day is happily gone by for such men. The idea of corporal punishment, in connection with mental cultivation, has given place to other, and better means of instruction. With man's advancement in the knowledge of human nature, and with the spread of christian influences has succeeded a more just and philosophical mode of imparting instruction. Experience and common sense have exposed the cru-

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elty and the folly of attempting to improve the mind by means of bodily suffering. They have shewn the way to knowledge to be easy and pleasant to all who seek after it. They condemn the practice of scourging the child, who is unable to satisfy the exorbitant demands of his teacher, or for faults committed. But they direct an appeal to his reason and his justice for exertion in the one case, and for conviction in the other. In fact, they show the utility of treating the scholar, as a rational being, and to seek, by ennobling and elevating his nature, to lead him, by emulation, to the highest attainments.

In the selection of teachers you should be especially careful not to employ men, who are, in the least, addicted to drinking. A parent, who has any regard for his child, would never think of committing him to the guidance and controul of a person of this description. Sobriety in a teacher is of the last importance. Moreover, we can never expect to make our Schools useful and respectable without this qualification. For my own part, I have made it a rule to insist upon it in every case, and I earnestly invite you all to co-operate with me in so desirable a purpose.

The absence of uniformity in School Books is much and justly complained of. Difficulties will continue, both with the teacher and the children, as long as this complaint exists. The duties of the former would be less onerous, and the labours of the latter more facilitated, and their improvement would be more rapid, if their books would admit of their more general classification. I hope this will not be forgotten.

I have reason to think, that an improvement, with regard to Schools, is gradually taking place among us. A more general feeling seems to exist of their importance, and of the necessity of their encouragement. Education seems to be more valued and more sought after. The people are beginning to appreciate its worth, and to discover, that more depends upon it, than was, at first, supposed, in fact, that they are nothing without it. I earnestly entreat you, therefore, to persevere in your exertions after it. Consider the value of knowledge, and think what the difficulties and privations of your children must be without it. By giving them a good, sound, practical education, you enable them to get on respectably in the world. Without it, you not only virtually exclude them from all honors and promotion, but you send them forth among their fellows to be literally "*herens of wood and drawers of water.*" What parent is there, with the ordinary feelings of our nature, who could bear to see his child thus treated and despised?

I cannot conclude better, than by giving the following extract.

Speaking of Common Schools, the author says:—"Though common, these humble seminaries are mighty agents. They are the lever which raised our country to her present position. Much as we are indebted to Colleges, Academies, and other similar Institutions, we owe more, inestimably more, to Common Schools. Opening the doors to all, sowing the seeds of learning, broadcast, over the land, their contributions to the intelligence and consequently to the prosperity and enjoyment of all, though bestowed in small portions to each, yet, in the aggregate, attain to a vast amount. From these primary assemblies ooze out the rills, which, commingling, form the streams, that are ever washing out our moral and political stains. Stop the flowing of these waters, and our fair land would fast blacken with ignorance, vice, and crime—Liberty would lose her nourishment, philanthropy her most invigorating draughts, and christianity her invaluable supplies. Christians, philanthropists, patriots, cherish these nurseries of the mind and heart of the next generation. Farmers, these Schools are invaluable to your children, and to your country. Few higher duties rest upon you, than that of lending wise, generous, and constant aid to the schools of your District. Notice and encourage the teacher. By your example, influence all parents to send their children to school. Supply your children well with Books. Let them be industrious, obedient, and constant in attendance. Help cheerfully to support the school house comfortable. These points are, all of them, important. Each is worthy of serious thought, and, when well considered in all their bearings and influence, you cannot fail to see, that our Country's future eminence depends on the high character of our Common Schools."

Your obedient servant,

E. BURNHAM,

*County Superintendent of Common Schools
for the Colborne District.*

Peterborough, January 1st. 1846.

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